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ABSTRACT

The author discusses improvement in quality of special education through the use of the individualized education program (IEP) as a placement, instructional, and planning tool. Conditions necessary for using the IEP effectively are listed. Implementation of the IEP as placement, instructional, and planning tools is noted to depend on four factors--policy interpretations, structure of the schools, implementation strategies employed, and macro-sociopolitical factors. Two implementation strategies presented in Federal Special Education Regulations are considered, compliance monitoring (a power-coercive strategy) and a comprehensive system of personnel development. Discussed are four principles to guide IEP development: (1) participatory planning, (2) internal consistency, (3) cooperative use, and (4) mutual supportiveness. It is pointed out that IEP implementation efforts directed toward organizational change should reflect considerations which include existing organizational structures and the application of normative principles within the referral planning and placement process. Four considerations relating to personnel development efforts are also mentioned, such as the avoidance of overreliance on inservice education as the sole procedure for developing personnel. It is concluded that locally orchestrated organizational change and personnel development can increase the utility of IEPs. (SW)

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**Increasing the Usefulness of
the Individualized Education Program**

**Massachusetts Federation
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November 6, 1981**

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Special education is defined as "specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the handicapped child" (Federal Special Education Regulations, 121a 14, 1977). While sometimes considered as synonymous with a student's special education placement, specially designed instruction must include both sequenced instructional content and instructional methods which respond to a student's unique needs. Unique needs and specially designed instruction are initially identified within the special education referral, planning and placement process.

Dominant policy themes within this process include: Due Process - Process - Procedural Safeguards, Protection in the Evaluation Process (PEP), the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Due Process requires informed parental consent to proposed changes in the identification, evaluation or educational placement of their child. PEP requires the use of pluralistic assessment practices intended to minimize discriminatory actions. Collaboratively developed by parents, teachers and administrators, the IEP orchestrates unique needs, specially designed instruction, and service delivery. The LRE is that individually determined educational setting within which both the benefits of specially designed instruction and the benefits of incidental learning through interaction with "normal" students may be experienced by each handicapped student.

Improvement in the quality of special education can result from implementation of the IEP as a placement tool, an instructional tool, and a planning tool. For while nearly all handicapped students have an IEP, serious reservations about its utility exist.

As a placement tool the IEP can be used to manage delivery of specially designed instruction and/or related services in response to each handicapped student's unique needs. If the IEP is to be used as a placement tool present level statements and annual goals must reflect unique student needs. The

following conditions must be established for these components to accurately reflect student needs:

1. A present level statement must be written for each area within which either "specially designed instruction" or a related service is required. Such present level statements signify the content of special education/related service required by the student.
2. An annual goal must be forecast for each present level statement.
3. Each annual goal must be forecast given the provision of appropriate special education/related service. Annual goal statements provide an approximation as to amount special education/related services required.
4. Content of present level and annual goal statements must be based upon accurate and inclusive evaluation data.
5. Qualitative considerations generated through analysis of evaluation data and synthesis of clinical judgement are combined with present level statements and annual goals. Combined qualitative and quantitative factors yield subjective indices of student need.

Given these indications of student need, the following conditions must be met for the IEP to be used as a placement tool:

6. All appropriate special education options are reviewed in terms of responsiveness to the handicapped student's needs. Instructional expertise, characteristics of other students, availability of instructional materials/equipment, and location of the program should be considered.
7. Responsive special education services are provided.

8. Provision of special education is monitored and student impact is evaluated.

9. Programmatic adaptations are made as they are required.

Specification of student needs and selection of a special education program consistent with these conditions results in use of the IEP as a placement tool.

As an instructional tool the IEP is of most use to service providers (i.e., teachers, speech therapists, counselors, etc.). For the IEP to be used as an instructional tool the following conditions must be met:

1. A present level statement must be written for each area within which specially designed instruction is required.
2. Statements which describe present levels of educational performance must be written with accuracy, reliability, and in instructionally relevant terms.
3. An annual goal for each present level statement must be forecast based upon all that is known about the student and his learning.
4. Short term instructional objectives representing incremental steps of progress related to present level statements and annual goals must be generated.
5. Use of instructional materials and/or procedures may be recommended on the basis of accurate and inclusive assessment data.

When present level statements are written accurately, reliably, and in relevant terms they identify areas and levels within which to initiate instruction. When the service provider is convinced of the propriety and legitimacy of annual goals and short term instructional objectives, they become standards against which to measure the rate of student learning. And, use of optimal instructional procedures and materials may be recommended.

As a planning tool, the individualized education program can be most useful to the special education administrator. For it to function as a planning tool, the following conditions are required:

1. Student need for special education/related service must be accurately and precisely described.
2. Those special education/related services most responsive to a student's needs are identified by the planning and placement team. For some handicapped students those services which are "appropriate" may not be available either within the LEA or through subcontractual agreements.
3. Recommendations regarding appropriate instructional materials and appropriate instructional procedures are made by the planning and placement team. Some instructional materials may not be available; skill in some instructional procedures may not exist within the faculty.
4. Indices of student performance in relation to instructional objectives and annual goals is systematically collected and concisely reported in terms of program prototype, age range of the students served, and degree of disability.
5. Each student's mobility across program prototypes is noted.

The need for program placements, instructional materials, instructional procedures, student performance indices and mobility across program prototypes must be aggregated across IEPs. The following planning decisions may be based upon aggregated data:

1. Decisions about the need for additional programs and/or personnel reallocation may be based upon data collected.
2. Decisions about the need for specialized instructional materials may be based upon data collected.

3. Decisions about the need for job embedded inservice education for specific professionals can be based upon information collected.
4. Decisions about either altering goals and objectives or influencing instructional input related to student performance may be based upon information provided.

For the IEP to function as a planning tool it must function effectively as both a placement tool and an instructional tool. Additionally, administrative encouragement must be provided for including specific statements in the IEP and for identifying, whenever appropriate, the use of particular instructional materials and procedures. Most importantly, professionals must be committed to the utilitarian value inherent in the IEP and its developmental processes.

Implementation of the IEP as placement, instructional, and planning tools depends upon four factors: (1) policy interpretations, (2) the structure of schools, (3) the implementation strategies employed, and (4) macrosociopolitical factors.

Ambiguous policies often result in misunderstanding, confusion, or value conflicts among those whose actions are guided by the policy (Berman, 1980). To minimize ambiguity experienced by special educators about the IEP, two bulletins have been published and disseminated by the Office of Special Education, Division of Assistance to the States (DAS Information Bulletin #50, November 1979; DAS Information Bulletin #64, May 1980). Clarification provided by these bulletins and a recent interpretation of IEP requirements (Federal Register, January 19, 1981) support and reinforce expectations for utilitarian IEPs.

Public schools possess unique organizational characteristics which influence implementation of the IEP. Schools as bureaucracies are viewed as "totally rational and systematic organization(s) based on rules, procedures, competence, contracts and objectivity" (McKibben, 1981). From the view of schools as bureau-

cracies, the following are axiomatic:

1. Schools are essentially goal directed; they work systematically to attain their goals.
2. Schools are governed by rational decision making which reflects a superordinate decision making process.
3. Schools are composed of individuals organized into subunits. Subunits are collected into larger units and coupling exists among and within all units.

Action to increase the utility of IEPs which is based upon these self-evident truths is largely symbolic. Because while they are applicable to some organizations these axioms do not apply to schools.

Schools discover goals as they work. Schools can only envision as goals those outcomes which are familiar and known. Goals generally reflect outcomes which a school knows it can produce. Schools know they can produce certain outcomes because they have been accomplished in the past. Hence, a school's goals represent a written prospective view of what it has done. Annual goals for a handicapped student contained within the IEP reflect accomplishments with other similarly handicapped students. Both school and student goals reflect past accomplishments. Familiar, though not necessarily systematic, goal attainment procedures are likely to be employed in both organizational and individual instances.

Decision making models employed by schools appear more arational and political than rational. Within the special education referral, planning and placement process decision making appears as arational because of multiple and mixed preferred outcomes, unclear assessment technology, and fluid professional participation. Preferred outcomes are multiple and mixed because they are not self-evident. Preferences are detected through action within the process, but

only infrequently do they become crystallized in common conviction. Assessment technology which illuminates various action alternatives is incompletely understood. Despite advances in instrumentation and technique, clinical judgment continues as the primary basis for identification instructional and placement decisions. Many professionals participate in many decisions within the referral, planning and placement process. Professionals opt in and out of decision making activities with impunity. General educators who would like to participate are left out. And, all are eager to disagree with decisions should either personal discomfort or an absence of logic be evident.

Decision making models employed by schools are more political than rational. School decision making is political in its need to satisfy multiple constituencies and individuals. For without a critical mass of individuals actions required by decisions are not performed. Political decision making is evident throughout the referral, planning and placement process. Assessments are performed to appease individual teachers, parents, and principals. A disproportionate number of handicapped students are identified as learning disabled to satisfy both parents and professionals. Important instructional decisions are deferred to classroom teachers who initially requested assistance in making them.

Educational organizations are loosely coupled. (Weick, 1976). "Wide variation of input in the form of students and personnel is experienced by schools. The role performance of teachers is relatively invisible to other teachers or superiors. And, a low interdependence of parts exists in schools." (Johnson, 1970). In loosely coupled systems, the work of one individual does not necessarily influence the work of other individuals; what one teacher does may/may not determine what other teachers do.

Moreover, it is easy to find examples of "(1) independence rather than interdependence among units; (2) processes that seem disconnected rather than linked; (3) actions isolated from consequences; and (4) individuals who function with little or no supervision." (Clark, 1981) To expect collaborative instructional programming among general and special educators in the absence of facilitative mechanisms is to ignore the loosely coupled nature of schools. Observing little in the way of social and instructional integration of the mildly handicapped students in regular classes supports the importance of facilitative mechanisms.

Strategies employed to implement the IEP influence its usefulness. Two distinct implementation strategies are available: structured strategies and adaptive strategies. Structured strategies employ a carefully planned approach which is clear in its conceptualization of levels and dimensions of implementation (Fullan, 1979). Adaptive strategies encourage variation in the innovation being implemented and open ended implementation procedures. Thoughts about matching the implementation strategy and situational parameters (Berman, 1980) are summarized in Table I

TABLE 1

Situational Parameters	Situation Type	
	Structured	Unstructured
Scope of Change	incremental	major
Certainty of Technology or Theory	certain within risk	uncertain
Conflict over Policy's Goals and Means	low conflict	high conflict
Structure of Institutional Setting	tightly coupled	loosely coupled
Stability of Environment	stable	unstable

If all situational parameters are structured then programmed implementation strategies are appropriate. If any one of the situational parameters is unstructured then adaptive implementation strategies are appropriate.

Two implementation strategies are presented in Federal Special Education Regulations: compliance monitoring and a comprehensive system of personnel development. Compliance monitoring may be described as a power-coercive strategy. In general, the emphasis in power-coercive strategies is "upon political and economic sanctions in the exercise of power" and change (Chin and Benne, 1976). Adverse publicity and withholding money are the sanctions commonly employed when SEAs and LEAs are judged to be in noncompliance.

Responses by systems to the application of power-coercive strategies include:

- "1. Coercion leads to strong efforts to avoid being coerced.
2. If resources for fighting back are available, the greater the coercion applied, the more counter aggression that is called forth.
3. If resources are not available but opportunities to escape are, the greater the tendency to leave the situation.
4. If resources for fighting back are not available, or if there other strong incentives for staying in the situation (material rewards or potential power), the greater the coercion that is applied, the greater the tendency to comply with exactly those demands that are necessary to avoid being coerced.
5. If resources for fighting back and opportunities for escape are not available, the greater the tendency to dull compliance and passive resistance" (Collins, 1975).

Each of these responses has been experienced within the special education community. Though these response patterns may appear negative, there are many

positive changes which are directly related to the use of power-coercive strategies in special education. More handicapped students are receiving special education and related services and written policies exist to guide action. The following examples substantiate some changes effected through compliance monitoring:

- "1. Approximately 12,000 pupils eliminated from Chicago Public School waiting list in two years.
2. Minnesota now allows immediate entry into impartial due process procedure.
3. All states now require multi-assessment, multi-team procedures.
4. Interagency agreements in effect in majority of states to ensure Part B requirements among all of states public agencies (e.g, Welfare, Mental Health, Correctional facilities).
5. Procedures now in effect in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois to insure completion of IEP prior to placement" (Blodgett, 1980).

These accomplishments are real and tangible. Yet, there should be no confusion about distinctions between compliance with special education regulations and implementation of special education regulations. "Compliance" connotes obsequious, and sometimes docile actions in accordance with literal meanings of requirements. "Compliance" represents action consistent with a minimal standard of performance. "Implementation" connotes useful, complete and fulfilling actions. "Implementation" reflects action consistent with a utilitarian standard of performance.

A comprehensive system of personnel development (CSPD) may respond to quality of instruction concerns associated with P.L. 94-142 (Schofer and Duncan, 1980). A CSPD involves all who work with handicapped students in the cohesive, unified, ongoing development of procedures, practices, and people (Gilmore, 1980). A CSPD should use supervision, consultation, inservice education, and systems level change as methods of change.

To be maximally effective, a CSPD should consciously consider the multiple work place factors which influence professional performance. If it can control for highly variable entry levels and learning rates of its participants, inservice education has positive change potential. To maximize its change potential, inservice education must get the right content to the right people at the right time(s) using the appropriate processes. The "right content, right people, and right times" for inservice education must be determined through participatory planning within the work place.

Most compliance monitoring and personnel development efforts are structured. They are planned, purposeful, and programmed. Often they establish and support minimal satisfactory levels of performance.

Given the characteristics of the individualized education program and the organizational characteristics of the school, the greatest impact would result from use of adaptive implementation strategies. Adaptive strategies accomplish as broad a scope of change as the setting allows. They recognize the characteristics of the IEP, the organizational characteristics of the school, and that facilitate development of this organization. An adaptive implementation strategy recognizes the unique characteristics of adult learners and provides personnel development experiences which reflects those recognitions.

Macro sociopolitical factors, like economic factors, political factors and personal values influence implementation of innovations in schools. "A receptive institutional setting provides explicit, steady support for change agents efforts and is a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective implementation." (RAND), 1975). So, professionals and schools most interested in increasing the usefulness of the IEPs should be the initial participants in implementation efforts.

Factors which influence implementation of the IEP should be carefully considered and reflected in future efforts. Future development and use of

IEPs should be guided by four principles: (1) participatory planning; (2) internal consistency; (3) cooperative use; and (4) mutual supportiveness.

Participatory planning reflects the conviction that each person's work counts for something in relation to the work of others for the benefit of each handicapped student. Work performed by diagnostic personnel, administrators, general and special educators, and parents must be meaningfully segmented, organized, and integrated. Diagnosticians who have identified unique student needs and proposed specially designed instruction must participate in developing each IEP. Administrators who allocate resources necessary to implement each IEP must participate in and chair meetings at which the IEP is developed. Teachers selected for their capacity to provide specially designed instruction must participate in planning each IEP. As consumers who signify the appropriateness of each IEP, parents must meaningfully participate in developing each IEP. Those whose efforts are to be orchestrated by it should participate in developing each IEP.

Internal consistency reflects an identifiable relationship among reason(s) for referral, content of the psychoeducational assessment and components of the individualized education program. Internal consistency is present when the following questions are answered affirmatively.

1. Do assessment instruments and procedures provide information related to the reason(s) for referral?
2. Is the content of the individualized education program related to assessment results?
3. Do present level of performance statements identify those areas which require specially designed instruction?
4. Are present level of performance statements related to assessment results?
5. Is there an annual goal for each present level statement?
6. Do annual goals identify anticipated outcomes of specially

designed instruction?

7. Do short term instructional objectives identify intermediate points of student progress between present levels of performance and annual goals?
8. Does the content of individualized education programs vary by program placement prototype (i.e., resource program, self-contained class program, special day program, residential school program)?
9. Does the content of individualized education programs vary by chronological age group placement of students (i.e., pre-school programs, elementary school programs, middle school programs, junior-senior high school programs)?

Cooperative use requires that each educator who interacts with a handicapped student does so in ways which optimize learning. Cooperative use means that special instruction provided by each teacher is coordinated with special instruction provided by all teachers. When planned special instruction is implemented in coordinated practice, cooperative use of the IEP is evident.

Mutual supportiveness means that those who provide special instruction help one another. Each assists the other in accomplishing that which has been identified as important for the handicapped student. When teachers elevate the performance of one another to the advantage of each handicapped student, mutual supportiveness is present.

Professional practice consistent with these four principles will increase the usefulness of IEPs as placement, instructional, and planning tools. Highly motivated, self-directed school based educational change is required to actualize these principles in practice.

Future efforts to increase the utility of IEPs should reflect those factors which influence implementation of innovations in schools. Normative principles related to the IEP must be modeled within implementation efforts and embedded in future professional practices. Decisions about alternative IEP uses, supportive policy and professional practice require a data base. The extensiveness and complexity of the data base should vary in relation to the scope and complexity of the decisions it supports. Relevant data should be presented to appropriate decision makers in a timely fashion. Data should be presented understandably, in limited amounts and in verifiable form.

Implementation efforts directed toward organizational change should reflect the following considerations. First, preferred uses of the IEP must be clarified and consensus for these uses elicited. This paper describes three alternative uses of the IEP. Other equally as important and significant uses exist. Satisfying mandated requirements, communicating with other agencies, and establishing financial responsibility for services are legitimate uses of the IEP. Even continuing current use of the IEP is appropriate when professionals are convinced that its benefits are being appropriately experienced. Situational factors which influence alternative uses of IEPs should be identified and considered. Concept papers requisite to the use of the IEP as a placement tool (Tracey and Pappas, 1980), an instructional tool (Cawley, 1980) and a planning tool (Gillespie-Silva, 1980) are available upon request from this author.

Second, existing organizational structures require examination. Those organizational structures essential to alternative uses of the IEP must be identified and influenced. Illustratively, parallel administrative structures for special and general education may adversely influence mainstreaming efforts at the building level. Pending examination such structures may require alteration.

Third, application of normative principles within the referral planning and placement process must be determined. Descriptions of the special education service delivery system are required. Descriptions may include: (1) distinctive

features of each program within the system; (2) entry and exit criteria for each program; and (3) objectives, content, procedures and evaluative criteria for each program. Additionally, mechanisms which facilitate mainstreaming require identification and articulation.

Fourth, educational policy which enables preferred use of the IEP should be formulated. Policies should be developed by those who will implement them; policies should enable professional practice consistent with preferred uses of the IEP.

Overlap between organizational development and personnel development exists. However, at a minimum, implementation efforts directed toward personnel development should include the following considerations. First, personnel development procedures should include consultation, supervision, and inservice education. Procedures should be selected consistent with the kind and amount of development anticipated. Overreliance on inservice education as the sole procedure for developing personnel should be avoided.

Second, professional procedures and practices which are markedly influenced by the culture of the school should be building based. These procedures and practices should be conducted within individual schools and must include a critical mass of faculty.

Third, unifying team building activities may be required by Multidisciplinary Teams. All standing members should be actively involved in those efforts to elevate team performance. Particular attention should be directed toward the effects of changing team membership as different classroom teachers participate in various segments of the team work.

Fourth, role specific alteration of professional practice should be conducted only with the target role group. Performance requirements differ between jobs. Therefore, for job embedded performance changes, professionals should be grouped by role.

Factors outside the education system, macrosociopolitical factors, influence the amount of support available for change. Changes which maximize the utilitarian value of available resources will be supported. Organizational changes and personnel development procedures outlined in this paper have utilitarian value and may require only reallocation of available resources.

Locally orchestrated organizational change and personnel development can increase the utility of individualized education programs. Special education, as a result, can more closely approximate the promise of its definition -- to provide specially designed instruction which responds to the unique needs of each handicapped student.

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